DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 150 UD 023 669

AUTHOR Malcom, Shirley M.
TITLE Is Educational Equity Being Addressed in Proposed Standards for Students, Teachers and Schools?
PUB DATE 26 Apr 84
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 26, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; *Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Government Role; Handicap Discrimination; *Nondiscriminatory Education; Racial Discrimination; Sex Discrimination

ABSTRACT

Equity was an invisible issue in the recent reports calling for higher pre-college standards and increased Federal spending on education. Although usually mentioned, equity was part of the (political) rhetoric, not a concrete goal. In "A Nation at Risk," for example, minority and handicapped students are discussed, but with the implication that their different needs lead to different educational outcomes. The terms "gender," "sex," or "female" do not even appear in the report. In many reports, recommendations are not always based on economic and political realities, awareness of bias, or past history. Calls are made for greater government participation at a time when Federal interest in educational spending is declining. Curriculum suggestions fail to address the facts that courseware, for instance, should be bias-free, and that different students learn in different manners. Although the educational fate of minorities and females is often decided before high school, most reports focus solely on secondary education. In short, "equity" must be a key term in standard formulation; recommendations mean nothing without financial backing; and the educational system is in so complex a dilemma that easy solutions are impossible. (KH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Is Educational Equity Being Addressed in Proposed Standards for Students, Teachers and Schools?

Presented by
Shirley M. Malcom
Program Head, Office of Opportunities in Science
American Association for the Advancement of Science

at the
American Education Research Association
April 26, 1984
New Orleans, Louisana

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Shirley M. Malcom

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED246150

The recent avalanche of reports on the state of education in America has led to renewed interest in education — its deficiencies, the consequences of these deficiencies and remedies for removing them. Governors are discussing the issues and running on platforms that include education reforms. All major presidential candidates except one (the incumbent) has called for increased federal money for education. (Higher Education and National Affairs, Vol. 33, Number 8, February 24, 1984.) The Business - Higher Education Forum composed of leaders from both these sectors has tied educational improvements to future productivity and economic development. The Department of Defense worries about filling its quota of 18 years old in 1992 from among the high school graduates in the bottom of the trough of a declining 18 year old population. States worry about having the workforce to meet its manpower needs. (High School Graduates: Projection for the Fifty States, 1984, WICHE, Boulder, CO).

With all this attention to the problems of education one could anticipate that a full range of often contradictory solutions would be offered. In a recent publication, Summary of Major Reports on Education (1983), the Education Commission of the States compared assumptions, findings and recommen ations from 10 documents. ECS identified 175 separate state-level task groups that are currently active or have reported their recommendations since early 1982. They also identified nine additional national reports on education which will be forthcoming.

With all this attention one would also expect that virtually every possible perspective would have been offered and virtually every position on the topics of teachers, curriculum, management and responsibilities advanced. While the reports may differ on the fine points, all agree that reform is needed now and that standards should be raised. As we look at the various recommendations for improving standards, where

UD023669

do we find equity considerations? Equity is invisible. While almost every report mentioned some aspect of equity as a consideration, the discussion was generally only a part of the rhetoric, and was quickly forgotten when dealing with substance, process and recommendations. Equity was a macro issue, to be dealt with mainly in the abstract, an issue that required little if any programmatic response.

Let's take a few concrete examples. In A Nation at Risk minorities are mentioned specifically as one of the groups to be benefitted by educational reform (p.6), functional illiteracy among minority youth is noted as a indicator of risk (p.8); commitment to twin goals of excellence and equity is stated (p. 13). But these statements of general support for educational pluralism are not accompanied by concern within the findings that minorities, female and disabled students are disproportionately underrepresented among advanced level high school courses in mathematics or science, or that minorities are overrepresented in general or vocational tracks.

There are selective equity concerns. Although minority and handicapped students are discussed in A Nation at Risk, it is almost always implied that they have special needs leading to different educational outcomes. Not once are females mentioned as a population needing specific attention. Not once were the differences in educational performance and coursetaking patterns of males and females seen as issues of concern (I could not even find "gender," "sex," "female" or any equivalent phrase mentioned in the report).

Recommendations were advanced that State and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that students take (a) 4 years of English, (b) 3 years of mathematics, (c) 3 years of science, (d) 3 years of social studies, and (e) one-half year of computer science. It is interesting to see where this recommendation gets us in concern for equity. From High School and Beyond (National Center for Education Statistics, 1981) we find that a greater percentage of Black students reported taking 2 or more years of mathematics in high school than white students. They did not, however, take the kind of mathematics needed for college — algebra, geometry, advanced algebra, trigonometry, etc., or for developing higher problem solving skills. Generalized recommendations couched as the numbers of years of mathematics, science, English, etc. will not get us to equity. Neither will stated competencies and tested competencies where students are not being taught and given the content and skills necessary to achieve mastery. Competency testing without teaching to competency is ludicrous.

Recommendations under Standards and Expectations force reliance on either standardized tests of achievement (despite their problems) or, worse still, unvalidated, unstandardized home grown versions of these tests. Students are required to give different and better performance even while there may have been no change in the quality of what they receive in the classroom. Factors to be considered for textbook selection did not include that materials be free of bias, in addition to being educationally sound and challenging.

While school districts and state legislatures are encouraged to lengthen the school day and school year, it is not clear to anyone how this can be financed, especially in urban inner city and rural districts where most minority students are educated. While we all want discipline in schools, as a former teacher I argue that the best way to achieve it is with capable teachers, challenging curricula and clear expectations. We cannot just buy into this rather vague idea without considering that expulsion and suspension have in the past been used disproportionately with minority students.

It makes a difference whether we view excellence and equity as compatible goals or goals that are indispensable to each other. In one case we call for peaceful coexistence; in the other for active alliance. Almost all of the reports see the federal government as the appropriate responsible agent for ensuring that civil rights are protected and that special needs of special populations are met. Yet, over the past three years the federal government has shown a decreasing interest in shouldering this responsibility. Regulations to protect equity in education which are on the books are not being enforced. In a number of court cases, this Administration reversed the position held by previous Administrations and joined the side of those who would deny equity. The recent Grove City decision from the U.S. Supreme Court frightens those of us who have seen some gains for women, using the force of Title IX. We are paralyzed with apprehension of what is to come when we realize how close the legislative language in Title IX is to that in civil rights laws covering the education of minorities and disabled persons.

The Supreme Court decison on Grove City has some rather interesting twists. I see a tremendous irony in the fact that the single office on a college campus which is charged with enforcing equity by virtue of federal financial aid at the institution is that unit charged with administering such funds. There is evidence to suggest that their dealings have been less than equitable in the past since females receive less aid

than males and are more likely to report self-sources of support for education. (See Report of the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance.)

The report of the National Science Board Commission on Pre-College Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology calls for the establishment of groups to monitor and evaluate activities undertaken to achieve educational reform; they do not, however, call for care in determining the make up of the groups. Shouldn't the stakeholders be included prominendly? Shouldn't the panels reflect the target audiences? Shouldn't somebody say this? After all, half of those to be served are female, many are minority and some are disabled. While the NSF report speaks to educational needs based on race, gender, ethnic background, language spoken in the home or socioeconomic status, not once does it address the needs of disabled persons. Too often access problems for physically handicapped youth in science and mathematics are direct and disabling: they either can't get to or are not allowed in science classes, or they are given "science for the handicapped" which probably starts from the assumption that there's no way the youth are taking the class as prelude to a career. In spite of federal standards calling for the education of handicapped children in the least restrictive environment, practice too often means denial of these standards.

While we incorporate computer literacy as a standard for pre-college education, serious consideration must be given to basic access to the technology (which the NSF report does address). The report does not address the fact that the software used in education should be bias free, and should build on what we know about how females, various racial/ethnic minorities and youth with different handicapping conditions learn. Rather than use the somewhat negative concept of "bias free," I'd like to shift the discussion to "equity enabling."

Sometimes in the zeal to be race or gender neutral, we see the call for reforms which may appear incompatible with what we know about equity programs. For example, several of the reports call for an elimination of tracking (e.g., A Place Called School, by John Goodlad and High School by Ernest Boyer). (This might be seen as a laudable goal considering how tracking has been used in the past as an instrument of discrimination.) On the other hand most effective academic intervention efforts for minority students have ability grouping and rigorous course tracks. How does one reconcile seemingly contradictory goals for tracking? The purpose to be served in the

two instances differs: in one case tracking is used to exclude, in the other case tracking is used to include.

As we look for ways to increase teacher competency in mathematics and science, where do we propose that our training efforts begin — at the high school level, at the junior high school level or at the elementary level. What factors are driving these decisions? It was clear to me that much of the concern voiced in the reports was for what goes on in the high school. Yet, for minority students, especially, the die is cast much earlier. These students are already far behind at high school or they have already been lost from the system. Young women have already opted out of taking their algebra in the 8th grade and are then on a track where they end up with a lot fewer advanced mathematics and science courses. Many minority students have already been directed into EMR or developmental programs by junior high school and disabled students excluded from laboratory work or segregated into science for the handicapped. And who is being trained or retrained? Most teachers of high school science are male while the overwhelming majority of elementary teachers (usually in self-contained classrooms) are female.

What is the structure of most inservice training in science? Obviously increasing content competence is and must be a major goal of such efforts. Improving classroom management techniques aand teaching methods are also laudable goals. Increasingly, standards of science curricula state that the applications of science and technology in the society, and careers in science and technology (the people behind the processes) are necessary aspects of science instruction. Seldom will you see "equity" included as a standard element of such training. What good is it to have a knowledgeable science teacher who only works with half of his or her class since the other half is believed to be incapable of learning or contributing to science.

The questions of financing needed reforms are overwhelming. The 1 April edition of the Washington Post tells the story of a school district in southern Georgia, which is controlled by a white school board and white superintendent, where the overwhelming majority of the public school population is Black. Many whites in that district send their children to private academies. The Black students must attend public schools which lack support for basic needs. The school board systematically votes down budget increases as a way of keeping down their local property taxes. This is local control of schools?! How will we ensure educational equity to the children in those schools?

Even if the standards are increased, how can improvements be financed? As the population ages, as the majority of those older voters seek to protect their own pocketbooks from rising property taxes, as more and more local governments set ceilings on property or other kinds of taxes, as the percentage of the voting population with school age children decreases, education budgets will be squeezed ("Demographic Imperatives: Implications for Educational Policy," 1983). We have kept our heads in the sand too long on the question of school financing. The reforms we seek, the reforms we need, have price tags attached, and the money must come from somewhere.

The reports are basically political documents. If at any time you had the opportunity to see into the process that created them, you know this. They have been effective in generating heat (and this is good), but few have shed any light. (On the equity side you can almost trace directly any of the statements in such reports to the handful of advocates present in each group.)

We have been presented with a problem -- a decline in the quality of pre-college education. How do we respond? We want a turnaround in this situation now. Inour haste to bring about change we have ignored some fundamental issues:

(1) We want to increase requirements for high school but already face teacher shortages in many of the very fields where we would increase requirements.

(2) We want to raise standards of student performance but have no idea of whether students are being provided with the quantity and quality of education in the classroom that will enable them to perform better.

(3) We have ignored the need to address the special requirements of those whom the educational system has traditionally failed. We have addressed the issue of improved education for <u>all</u> by homogenizing our view of the population to be served and the means of serving them.

We are looking for simple quick fixes to complex systemic problems. Ignoring equity concerns obscures the problems and solutions even more.

Thomas Jefferson once said, something like if you think education is expensive, try ignorance. I would paraphrase that and say, if you think achieving equity is

expensive, try inequity. Our country is part of a world community and world marketplace competing on various fronts (economically and militarily) with friends and enemies. We cannot afford a situation where well over half of the population is ill prepared educationally to contribute to the solution of our Nation's problems and the development of our Nation's resources.

We must view the development of educational standards as an extremely complex set of issues having multiple sets of consequences depending on the populations being served.